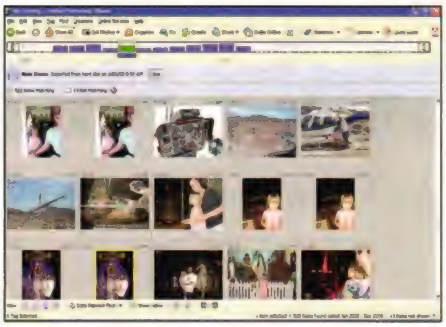
Adobe Photoshop Album



Photoshop Album
$49.99
Adobe
www.adobe.com

Digital camera owners know that with taking pictures comes the task of organizing them. The tools Windows includes, and cameras themselves, usually don't do the job.

Photoshop Album does help organize your digital shots, plus touch up and share them. Compared to Picasa, it's a behemoth. Picasa requires 50MB of hard drive space and takes seconds to install, PA requires 256MB and has a time-consuming installation. PA has the features to match its girth, but it can be slower and less easy to use than Picasa.

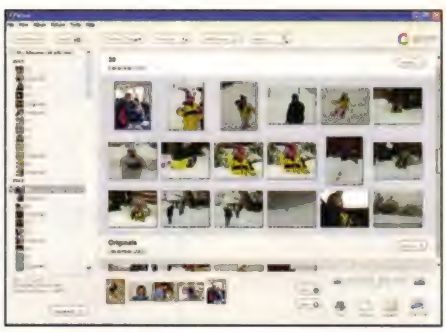
In addition to searching your hard drive for images and importing photos from a digital camera, PA can scan photos (this didn't work for me, turning up an uninformative error message instead). The app's photo editor includes cropping and red-eye removal, and there's a Single Click Fix feature for color, contrast, and sharpening. Results generally weren't as pleasing as Picasa's. There are also manual tools for correcting color, brightness, and contrast. Like Picasa, these are simple tools, not a full-fledged editor. (PA does integrate with Photoshop Elements, however.)

The program's flexible Creations Wizard lets you print an album, slideshow, greeting card, email card, or monthly calendar. You can also order a customized photo book or prints from Shutterfly.com. A cool PhotoCD function can burn a VCD slideshow with music that you can view on most DVD players. A calendar tool shows your photos in a wall calendar layout with images in date boxes to show when they were taken. The Adobe Atmosphere 3-D gallery is useless feature creep, however.

PA's Find functions are anything but useless, helping you select images taken within a certain time period or those with similar colors to a particular photo. PA is a great photo-management app. The learning curve is steeper than with Picasa, but several of its features are exceptional. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

Lifescape Solutions Picasa 1.5



Picasa 1.5
$29.99
Lifescape Solutions
www.picasa.net

Picasa makes working with even hundreds of pictures almost effortless. With it you can sort, edit, print, and email your pictures. In addition, its interface is elegant, simple, good-looking, and intuitive. I didn't even have to glance at the comprehensive help files.

The program starts by searching your hard drive for images. (You can use the app while it's searching—a nice touch.) It then sets up Watch Folders and automatically updates its catalog whenever you add pictures. The app can also import images from your digital camera.

The main Album View lets you sort images by date, write descriptions, and assign keywords. Other views let you peruse pictures in a scrolling timeline or a slideshow complete with MP3 music. A picture editor lets you crop and rotate images and repair red-eye. A one-click Enhance feature does a fantastic job of correcting color and contrast, turning muddy pictures into images you'd be happy to put in a photo album. A sharpen tool would be a welcome addition, however.

When it's time to make prints, Picasa will oblige by printing to your printer or offering up a photo-printing service. If you print photos yourself, you can choose any size from a single 8- x 10-picture to a contact sheet of 42 tiny images. Lifescape Solutions won't say which photo service it uses to order prints, but the program's integrated ordering tool keeps a running total of an order's cost. You can also email pictures or export an album as a Web page, using various templates or XML.

There is room for improvement, though. Picasa doesn't support the .PNG file format, and you can't create a CD of pictures directly from the software. Picasa also crashed once during testing for no discernable reason. Overall, though, Picasa is a stellar photo-management program. ▲

by Kevin Savetz

CPU Ranking: 0 = Absolutely Worthless 2.5 = Absolutely Average 5 = Absolutely Perfect